

A Blessing by James Wright

POEM

BEFORE YOU READ

A realization that someone you love also loves you, a perfect vault in gymnastics, sudden and complete understanding of a math concept that always gave you problems: These may be among the best moments in life, when everything works out well and you feel happy. In “The Blessing,” James Wright captures such a moment of joy.

LITERARY FOCUS: IMAGERY

Poets help us share their experiences by using **imagery**—language that appeals to one or more of our five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

- The **images** in “A Blessing” appeal mostly to two senses, sight and touch. As you read, think about how these images help you share the speaker’s experience.

READING SKILLS: READING A POEM

When you’re reading a poem, keep the following strategies in mind:

1. **Look for punctuation in the poem telling you where sentences begin and end.** Most poems—though not all of them—are written in full sentences.
2. **Do not make a full stop at the end of a line if there is no period, comma, colon, semicolon, or dash.** If there is no punctuation at the end of a line of poetry, most poets intend us to read right on to the next line to complete the sense of the sentence.
3. **If a passage of a poem is difficult to understand, look for the subject, verb, and complement of each sentence.** Decide what words the clauses and phrases modify.
4. **Be alert for comparisons—for figures of speech.** Try to visualize what the poet is describing for you.
5. **Read the poem aloud.** Poets are not likely to work in silence. The sound of a poem is very important.
6. **After you have read the poem, talk about it with someone and read it again.** This time, you’ll see things in the poem you didn’t see before.
7. **Read the poem a third time.** This time, the poem’s meaning should become clear.



Reading Standard 3.7
Recognize and understand the significance of various literary devices, including figurative language, imagery, allegory, and symbolism, and explain their appeal.

READING A POEM

Use punctuation clues to locate the poem's first sentence. Draw a box around the sentence.

IMAGERY

Circle the **images** in the poem—the words that help you see, touch, hear, smell, or taste something.

INTERPRET

In lines 22–24, the speaker creates a surprising **image**. What is he comparing himself to?

FLUENCY

Read the poem aloud twice. The first time you read, focus on where you pause in your reading and where you come to a full stop. The second time you read, focus on conveying the emotions of the speaker.

"A Blessing" from *The Branch Will Not Break* by James Wright. Copyright © 1963 by James Wright. Reprinted by permission of Wesleyan University Press.

A Blessing

James Wright

- Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass,
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
- 5 They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
- 10 That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the
darkness.
- 15 I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
- 20 And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
Into blossom.

